

INTRODUCTION

Most problems facing the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system arise directly or indirectly from human activity. Many different human activities interact directly with the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system. Six of these activities (agriculture, commercial forestry, waste disposal, residential and commercial development, mining and industrial development, and national defense) affect water quality or the fishery. Four other activities (commercial fishing, sports fishing, recreation and tourism, and wildlife habitat) are adversely affected by degraded water quality. Pressures on the system from these activities will continue to increase as a result of future population growth and economic development.

Technical solutions to many land use and water quality problems affecting the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system are available, but obstacles exist to their implementation. Many obstacles tend to be institutional or human-related (i.e., socio-economic). For example, the public may have little understanding of or appreciation for the complexity of most water quality problems and land use issues. This is particularly true for nonpoint source water pollution, where numerous, unrelated management decisions have significant adverse impacts on the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system.

Increased public awareness and positive public attitudes will be necessary to improve water quality. Resource managers and political leaders need to understand the attitudes of a broad, representative sample of the public, including those citizens who have not been involved in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine (A/P) Study's public meetings or citizen's advisory committees. Successful resource management will require strong support from different segments of the public. Such support will best be achieved by understanding public attitudes and knowledge.

This study uses a combination of social science research methods to analyze a wide range of public attitudes regarding the natural resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system. The information in this report was collected in a scientific telephone survey of 831 people selected at random from across the North Carolina portion of the A/P Study area. We also present selected results from 30 in-depth personal interviews conducted with some of the most knowledgeable scientists and leaders in North Carolina. This work should enhance the understanding and appreciation of resource managers, political leaders, and concerned citizens for the complex nature of public attitudes. In addition, this work should help build support for the goals of the A/P Study by identifying educational needs and providing a credible, scientific mechanism for greater public involvement in natural resource decision making.